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SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

In 1854, Commodore Matthew Perry and his fleet of black gun-ships sailed into the Tokyo Bay , ending Japan's seclusion system of more than 200 years.

March 6, 2004, marked the 150th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Amity between the United States and Japan--

(1) opening of Japanese ports to whaling ships and other merchant ships which sought provisions and fuel.

(2) opening of ports for trade

(3) pledge of humane treatment for castaway sailors.

My paper tonight will be about two men whose exploits in the decade preceding the Treaty are tangential to the course of events that follow.

Our first hero, Herman Melville, was born in New York City on August 1, 1819.

His father died in 1831 after suffering financial loss and a mental breakdown.

Between 1832 and 1841, Melville tried his hand at a variety of jobs including, clerking in his brother's hat store in Albany and working in his

uncle's bank.

In 1837, Melville sailed to Liverpool, England as a cabin boy on a merchant ship, the ***St. Lawrence*** (he describes some aspects of the trip in his novel, ***Redburn***) a diffcult transition from his mother's genteel household to the tough society of the trading vessel's crew. After six weeks in the English Port Prince, the ***St. Lawrence***, weighed anchor and returned to America with young Melville on board.

After returning to America, he went overland westward to Galena, Illinois. He visited his uncle, Thomas Melville, then serving as Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in the booming lead- mining town.

The Mississippi River, the prairies, lakes and forests appealed to the young vagabond during this short period in the Midwest. But he soon grew restless for the sea.

On January 3,1841, Herman Melville signed on as a seaman on a newly built whaling ship, ***Acushnet,*** which was sailing from New Bedford, Massachussetts, for better whaling grounds in the Pacific Ocean.

"Beating about Cape Horn for forty days" is the way he describes the voyage as the ship ventured westward into the Pacific" .In July, 1842, the Acushnet dropped anchor in the Bay of Tai-o-Hae in the Marquessas Island.

Newton Arvin, writes in his biography of Herman Melville: "Melville did not come to a literary career in response to an avocation of which he had been conscious from boyhood on but in a kind of inadvertence".

Many of his works were the result of blending facts, fiction and adventure—extraordinary adventures spawning vivid imagination.

At the age of 26, Melville found fame as the author of ***Typee****(1846)* an adventure of two shipmates who deserted their ship as it put in at a bay Nuka Hiva in the Marquesas Islands.

They headed inland and found the valley of a Polynesian tribe called Typee and lived among the hospitable people for a month.

However, when it became known that these hospitable Polynesians were cannibals, he and his companion escaped from their captivity by joining another whaling ship from Sidney, Australia, the ***Lucy Ann***.

In his book, ***Omoo***, Melville describes how the ship's crew was "resuscitated from their terminal thirst for liquor" by one resourceful crew member.

Pisco is a drink named after a small town in Peru where it is manufactured in large quantity. It is a drink well-known along the western coast of South America and is even found in Australia. The smell and taste of Pisco resembles that of a top-grade kerosene !

Cases of Pisco were kept in the after-hatch of the ship secured with bar and padlock. Among the men on board the ship was a man named "Bunge". He was a cooper by trade, whose liquor procuring expertise is described by Melville as follows:

"On the first expedition, the only one to be got at lay among other upon its bilge, with the bung–hole well over. With a bit of iron hoop, suitably bent, and a good deal of prying and punching, the bung was forced in; then the cooper's neck handkerchief, attached to the end of the hoop, was drawn in and out—the absorbed liquor being deliberately squeezed into a small bucket. Bunge was a man after a barkeepers' own heart".

Reaching the island of Tahiti, Melville joins a group of mutineeers who had been ordered by their ship's captain to weigh anchor and to sail on while the captain remained on the island. Melville and his companion were put to shore and left on the island as the ***Lucy Ann*** sailed away.

Melville eventually boarded a third whaler, the ***Charles and Henry***, and found himself in the port town of Lahaina on the island of Maui. While there, he spent time at odd jobs such as setting pins in a bowling alley; doing some bookkeeping and working as general clerk in a store.

Since his last two whaling expedition proved unprofitable, Melville had had enough of the cruising and chasing whales

On August 20, 1843, he signed on as Ensign on the U.S. frigate, the ***United States***, and spent the next 14 months as a sailor in the American Navy. Returning to the Charleston Navy Yard, Melville was discharged from the Navy on October 14,1844.

Melville's life as a rover, a life filled with physical danger, adventure and hardship, had ended and a new life of thought and feeling lay before him. In the following seven years , Melville, now in his mid-thirties, had published seven books :

Typee in 1846; ***Omoo*** in 1847; ***Mardi*** in 1849; ***Redburn*** in 1849;***White Jacket*** in 1850; ***Moby Dick*** in 1851 and ***Pierre*** in 1852

Billy Budd—was published postumously in 1924 from his manuscript.

When he began to write ***Moby Dick,*** Melville envisioned it to be another "whaling voyage" but his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, inspired him to revise the whaling documentary into a novel. However, with the publication of his masterpiece ***Moby Dick***, Melville's popularity as a writer began to decline, the work being ignored or its symbolism misunderstood by critics at the time.

He spent the remaining years of his life in private pleasure of writing poetry and working as deputy inspector in the Port of New York to earn a living.

Herman Melville died in New York City on September 28,1891.

Decades before Admiral Perry's fleet of black gunboats sailed into the harbor in Tokyo Bay, Herman Melville prophesized that " if parts of the world are still closed , it is the whaling ships that will open them—not gunboats, but whaling ships".

On board the whaling ship, ***Pequod***, as it cruised the waters near Japan seeking good whaling grounds, the voice of ***Ishmael*** is heard proclaiming that "If the double-bolted land of Japan is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for she is on the threshold" Ultimately, it was the gunboats that forced the Shogunate government to open its double-bolted door. But the terms set forth in the Treaty by then President Millard Fillmore were empelled in no small degree by forces exerted by the whaling industry and other merchants wanting access to the ports of Japan for economic reasons and for the alleviation of inhuman treatment of castaways.

MANJIRO

On one cold day in January, 1841, almost to the day that Melville left New Bedford on his first whaling ship, a small fishing boat with its crew of five men were drifting along the coast of Shikoku, Japan.

Unlike our hero, Herman Melville, plying the vast expanse of the world's ocean looking for whale, these men were on small boats close to shore fishing for Mackerel.

Storm clouds appeared on the third day and strong winds blew away the mail sail and broke the rudder.

Helpless and with no means to navigate, the boat drifted southeastward pushed by strong wind.

After nine days at sea, the men sighted a small volcanic island and frantically rowed toward the shore whose rocky shore and strong waves pounded and broke the boat. They managed to struggle ashore and found refuge in a cave where they survived by eating shellfish , seaweeds, nuts and birds.(they learned later that the island was called Bird Island—Torishima)

After five months on the island, Manjiro and his companions—Jusuke,25; Toramon,27; Denzo,38, the leader of the crew, and his brother,Goemon 15, were rescued by an American ship , the ***John Howland*** which was cruising the Pacific in search of better whaling grounds. The ship was captained by William H. Whitfield. .

Manjiro, the youngest member of the Japanese crew, learned the new language quickly and was able to communicate with Captain Whitfield who

taught him the names of objects on the ship and showed him how to help the American crew with chores. The captain was impressed with Manjiro's active role in capturing a whale. Nautical charts fascinated Manjiro so much that the Captain taught him how to study the chart and to plot the ship's course.

Six months after rescuing the Japanese, the ***John Howland*** arrived in Honolulu in November, 1841.

Captain Whitfield wanted to assist the Japanese men in returning to their home but had trouble communicating with them. Moreover, the men could not indicate their country of origin since Japan's closed door policy had forbidden the study of maps. The Captain's friend on the island helped solve the mystery when the Japanese recognized the words "Dai Nippon" printed on a shipping container and pointed to it as the name of their country—the Japanese name for Japan.

By now, the captain had developed a strong friendship with Manjiro.

He asked Manjiro if he would like to go to America where he could receive an education or learn a trade . He was pleased when Manjiro agreed to go.

The ***John Howland*** sailed for the United States via Cape Horn, arriving in New Bedford in May of 1843.

Having lived in a country isolated from foreign influence, Manjiro was fascinated by the cosmopolitan town –encountering men from far corners of the earth—speaking different languages ; some coming from whaling ships; others for a brief stopover or trying to settle among the Yankees.

Captain Whitfield lived in Fairhaven, a village across the river from New Bedford. He now began life with his second wife, his first wife having died during his absence at sea.

Manjiro lived with them as an adopted son and attended the local public school.

He helped with farm chores and studied hard to learn the new language, practising penmanship every day.

He loved reading and mathematics. He enrolled in a navigation school thinking that someday learning navigation would help him fulfill his dream of returning to Japan.

After finishing navigation school , Manjiro , now 19, began looking for a whaling ship that would be going near his homeland.

Luckily, Captain Ira Davis ,then, was recruiting men for his whaling ship, ***Franklin***, which would be sailing near Japan. Manjiro signed on as the steward on the ship which soon set out for the Pacific by sailing West rounding the Cape Horn.

During the voyage, Manjiro became an instant hero to the crew by leaping into the sea to capture a turtle which was a favorite delicacy of the crew.

In September of 1848, the ***Franklin*** arrived in Honolulu and Manjiro was reunited with his Japanese friends after many years.

They debated the idea of returning to Japan—whether it was safe given the Shogun's decree against citizens leaving the country without permission and what means they would have to travel back over such a vast distance to Japan. Manjiro suggested that they would need to save enough money to purchase supplies; a whaleboat and navigational instruments.

Again, Manjiro left his companions in Honolulu as he rejoined the crew of the ***Franklin*** on its voyage back to its home port, New Bedford.

Enroute, the captain of the ship became insane and had to be relieved of his . command, leaving a vacancy in the crew.

Manjiro, now at the age of 21 and having been at sea seven years, had proved himself to be an able navigator and a brave crewman after the turtle-catching episode. Thus the men agreed to promote him from his job as Steward to the rank of Third mate.

In September, 1849, the whaleship, ***Franklin*** reached New Bedford and after the whale oil was sold, Manjiro received $350.00—an amount not sufficient to finance his trip to Japan. He needed a miracle and

a miracle did arrive in the form of the "Gold Rush of 1849".

Captain Whitfield, knowing how much Manjiro wanted to rejoin his mother in Japan, encouraged him to take a chance by joining the 49ers. Manjiro was put on board a sailing ship carrying lumber from New Bedford around Cape Horn to San Francisco.

After panning for gold in Sacramento for four months, he saved $600.00—enough money to accomplish his dream.

Manjiro then traveled to San Francisco and boarded an ocean-going steamship to Honolulu where he rejoined his companions.

Having enough money now to acquire a whale boat and some supplies, the men worked out a plan to seek passage on some ship which would take them to Japan.

Fortunately, a ship, the ***Sarah Boyd,*** was in port preparing to head for Shanghai, China. Manjiro asked the Captain Jacob Whitmore to hire the three as crew members and to drop them off near the Ryukyu Island on his way to China. (Jusuke and Toramon had not rejoined the crew in Honolulu).

The captain was attracted to the offer but hesitated at first, saying that he would be shorthanded after the three left the ship.

Manjiro responded by saying that because Denzo and Goemon were untrained, they would not be of much use on board the ship and therefore, Manjiro offered to do the work of two men if all three could travel together. The captain, being desperately in need of men, agreed to the plan.
Manjiro then acquired a whale-boat, named ***Adventurer***, and put it on board the ***Sarah Boyd*** before it left Honolulu on December 17, 1850. As they approached the island of Okinawa in early January, 1851, Manjiro and the two men dropped the small whale-boat into the water and rowed ashore as the ***Sarah Boyd*** sailed away.

The villagers on Okinawa regarded the castaways with suspicion since Manjiro and his friends were in Western clothes and spoke Japanese with a different dialect. Manjiro, however, was sure the the people were Japanese because their food was familiar.
In 1851, Japan was still ruled by the military Shogunate who had sealed off their border from the outside world, fearful of Western forays which may bring dangerous ideas into the country. Anyone caught leaving the shore of Japan would be subject to punishment.

Manjiro and his friends had planned to leave Okinawa by sailing the whale-boat , ***Adventurer,*** across the strait to Shikoku, where Manjiro's mother lived.

However, before they could leave, they were confronted by officials on horseback who took away their belongings and locked the men in a small room.

Under interrogation by the officials, Manjiro related the story of the shipwreck and rescue ten years earlier and their voyage to the Sandwich Island, and telling them that they had always planned to return to Japan. Manjiro and his friends did not know then that they would be facing two years of interrogation by a series of Japanese Officials who were suspicious of their motives and yet, fascinated by their knowledge of foreign lands.

One of the officials asked Manjiro to step on plates bearing Christian symbols to prove that he had not become a Christian.

Another official wanted to see a world map Manjiro managed to have and he had a copy of it made by an artist so that it could be used later for surveying and navigation.

In July, 1853, Manjiro, Denzo and Goemon were transferred to the Island of Shikoku where they were questioned by the Lord Yamanashi for several months—questions mostly about American technology.

Finally, in October, 1853, Lord Yamanashi pardoned the men for leaving but they were not permitted to resume fishing as a profession.

A few days later, Manjiro was ordered back by Lord Yamanashi and asked to teach navigation and whaling at the school in Kochi, the Capital of the Island, Shikoku. In return, Manjiro was given a sword signifying that he was now a "Samurai"

For many decades, American whaling- ships and other merchant ships numbering 500 were in the north region of the Pacific seeking rights to stop in Japanese ports for food, water and repairs. The United States government, under President Fillmore, also wanted to put an end to Japan's policy of imprisoning Americans ship -wrecked on the coast of Japan.

In July, 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the U.S.Navy sailed a flotilla of warships into Tokyo Harbor (Edo) seeking to negotiate with Japanese officials about opening Japanese ports to American whaling ships.

In September of 1853, Manjiro was summoned to Edo to express his views about America's demand. Since he was the only person in Japan who had lived in the U.S., the Shogun considered him indispensible. Manjiro assured the Shogun that America wanted to obtain coal, water and food for the American ships cruising near Japan and wanted assurance that American castaways would not be imprisoned.

The Shogun showed his appreciation by giving Manjiro a higher Samurai rank and entitling him to take a family name. He chose the name "Nakahama" after his native village.

When Admiral Perry left Edo on his first trip in 1853,, he told the Shogun that he would be back to receive an answer to his demand that Japan open its harbor to American shipping and trading.

Lacking naval power to confront the American fleet, the Shogun signed a treaty in March 1854, agreeing to open two Japanese ports to American ships and to assist Americans who ship-wrecked off Japan.

The Shogun recognizing that Japan needed to become familiar with Western technology, asked Manjiro to translate into Japanese the new "American Practical Navigator", by Nathaniel Bowditch.

In 1859, Manjiro was asked to serve as an interpreter for a delegation to the United States to sign a more comprehensive treaty.

Enroute to the United States, the Japanese captain on the ship became ill and the American captain and Manjiro took over the helm and successfully sailed the ship ***Kanrin Maru*** into San Francisco in 1860.

Manjiro, however, was not permitted to continue with the delegation to Washington,D.C. because some delegates feared that he may be an American spy.

On January 1, 1868, the Shogunate was overthrown and the new government known as the Meiji Restoration was established with the Emperor becoming the ruler of Japan.

Manjiro took more ocean voyages to the United States and Europe as a member of delegations to study Western technology. On one of these trips, he journeyed to Fairhaven for a joyous reunion with Captain Whitfield , now age 75.

Although he has served both the Shogun and the Emperor as a loyal servant , Manjiro was viewed with suspicion throughout his life by some advisors who opposed opening Japan to the West and he was forced to carry a revolver, having survived several assassination attempts.

At the age of 43, Manjiro retired from public service and lived for 29 years until his death in 1898 at the age of 72.

On July 4, 1918 in the town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, a ceremony took place honoring Captain William H .Whitfield for his unselfish deed in rescuing Manjiro Nakahama in the waters of the Pacific and providing opportunity for his education in the United States.

In the ceremony, Dr. Nakahama, son of Manjiro Nakahama , presented a Samurai sword, —centuries old and of priceless value, as an emblem of gratitude and goodwill toward the people of the United States.

Lieutenant Governor Calvin Coolidge, Acting Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, extended the official welcome to the Japanese Ambassador Ishii who presented the sword with these words: "In a sense, the sword is typical of cruelty and wrong; in another sense, it stands for the loftiest conceptions of honor and virtue. To the old Samurai of Japan, whose spirit is reflected in the act of Dr. Nakahama, the sword was a symbol of spotless honor and the recipient's right to wear it signifies his worthiness to wear it aright."

Turning our clock back to a day in year 1860, we find a clipper ship named ***Meteor*** in San Francisco Bay. On board the ***Meteor*** is our hero Herman Melville, at the age of 40, looking to cross the Pacific again in quest of Asia. As reported in the San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin of October 12, 1860—"Mr. Melville is traveling in pursuit of health and new experiences to turn to account in a literary way"

While the ***Meteor*** is still in San Francisco , the city's Daily Alta newspaper reported the presence in the Bay of another clipper ship. The name of the ship is ***Kanrin-Maru*** and at the helm is Manjiro Nakahama who is serving

as interpreter with a delegation on a mission to sign a more comprehensive Treaty in Washington, D.C.

Manjiro and Melville in the presence of each other in San Francisco Bay.

Was it simply a coincidence, a chance encounter ?

Still unable to answer the question, I will choose to end my talk tonight with a passage from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Tales of a Wayside Inn."

"Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing . Only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness; So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another. Only a look, a voice, the darkness again and silence."